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UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
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RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN IMMEDIATE 0764
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 7266
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 151231

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2017
TAGS: [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [EUN](#)
SUBJECT: USG POSITION ON LEBANESE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

REF: A. BEIRUT 1652

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 1650

Classified By: NEA Acting A/S David M. Satterfield
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) This is an action request.

[1](#)2. (C) The Department requests posts' and other agencies' assistance to bolster international support for Lebanon's pro-sovereignty March 14 majority in its ongoing negotiations with the pro-Syrian opposition over a successor to current President Emile Lahoud. Lebanon's Cedar Revolution and UNSCRs 1559 and 1701 hang in the balance.

Objectives

[1](#)3. (SBU) Department requests posts and other USG agencies deploy the following points on an as-needed basis:

- Successful Lebanese presidential elections are a key priority of the United States.
- The Lebanese must select their next president. The United States will not endorse candidates, but we expect that Lebanon will elect a new president who is not beholden to outside powers or terrorist groups and who will uphold relevant international resolutions.
- The international community must be united in support of free and fair Lebanese presidential elections held according to Lebanon's constitution and without interference or intimidation.
- President Lahoud and the pro-Syrian opposition are trying to block democratic elections. We are concerned that opposition MPs might boycott the elections, that President Lahoud might refuse to step down when his term ends at midnight on November 23, or that a second, illegitimate government might emerge in Beirut.
- Noting that the Maronite Patriarch has described a boycott of Parliament's electoral session as a boycott of the nation,

we ask you to join us in emphasizing the civic responsibility of all MPs to attend electoral sessions. No one should use the threat of boycott to deprive Lebanon of a new president or to deprive Lebanon's Christians of their highest political office.

- The United States agrees that Lebanon deserves a strong, credible president who has the broadest possible support. At the same time, we recognize that democracies, including Lebanon's, have often elected presidents with less than two-thirds of votes. To name only two, President Sarkis and President Franjeh won Lebanon's elections with the barest minimum absolute majority vote.

- We must not pressure the March 14 coalition to give up its constitutional right to elect a president by absolute majority if necessary. This would weaken March 14's bargaining position and reward intimidation tactics like the September 19 assassination of Lebanese MP Antoine Ghanem, the eighth assassination of a pro-sovereignty Lebanese leader since 2005.

- The United States recently announced travel and financial sanctions against those who undermine Lebanon's sovereignty and democratic processes; we urge you to consider similar sanctions and strong messages to the Syrian regime that the world is watching them and that their interference in the Lebanese elections will have negative consequences.

- After elections, we urge you to immediately support a

STATE 00151231 002 OF 002

president who is elected according to the Lebanese constitution.

- We also urge you to provide assistance to Lebanese institutions such as the security services and central bank to support a legitimately elected president and his new government.

Background

14. (C) Lebanese MPs must elect a new president before the end of Emile Lahoud's term at midnight, November 23. The pro-sovereignty March 14 majority and pro-Syrian March 8 opposition have yet to agree on a successor to Lahoud or on the correct procedure for choosing one. Embassy Beirut has outlined several possible scenarios for the election (Ref B), none of which is ideal for USG interests. We are concerned that opposition MPs might boycott a parliamentary voting session, that President Lahoud might refuse to step down, or that a second, illegitimate government might emerge in Beirut. Fearing these outcomes, various European and Arab states have urged March 14 to "compromise" with the pro-Syrian opposition on a presidential candidate. Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri has postponed a parliamentary voting session until November 12, allegedly to allow more time for the two sides to reach a consensus.

Point of contact

16. (U) Please contact NEA/ELA Matthew Irwin (202-647-1058) or Ann Somerset (202-647-1030) with questions or for additional background information.

RICE